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119

THE GREEK PLAYS

IN THEIR RELATIONS TO

THE DRAMATIC UNITIES.

BY

GEORGE GOULD.

"The author has in one instance attempted to preserve, and in the other to approach, the 'unities'; conceiving that with any very distant departure from them, there may be poetry, but there can be no drama. . . . Was the law of literature throughout the world, and is still so in the more civilised parts of it?"—*Lord Byron*, Preface to *Sardanapalus*.

"In speaking of the drama of *Marino Faliero* . . . the desire of preserving, though still too remote, a nearer approach to unity than the irregularity, which is the reproach of the English theatrical compositions, permits," etc.—*Lord Byron*, Preface to *Marino Faliero*.

"I have strictly preserved all the unities hitherto, and mean to continue them. . . . My object has been to dramatise, like the Greeks . . . striking passages of history and mythology. You will find all this very unlike Shakespeare; and so much the better in one sense, for I look upon him as the worst of models. Mind the *unities*, which are my great object of research."—*Lord Byron*, Prefix to *Sardanapalus*.

"Whether Shakespeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design . . . it is impossible to decide and useless to enquire."—*Dr. Johnson*, quoted in note to Preface of *Sardanapalus*.

"If the story . . . had fallen into the hands of the barbarian Shakespeare," etc. "Lord Byron's passion for the unities."—*Bishop HEBER*, quoted in Prefix to *Marino Faliero*.

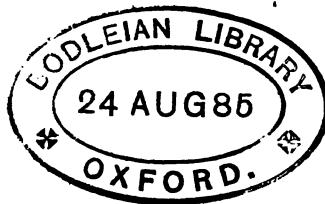
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THE GREEK PLAYS IN THEIR RELATIONS TO THE DRAMATIC UNITIES.

MANY are the idols before which the British public in this nineteenth century bow with unhesitating faith. Such as that the whole of Europe during the Middle Ages was covered by one dark night of ignorance. No doubt, at the fall of the Roman Empire, when Europe was overran by vast hordes of ruthless barbarians, and many who were not barbarians possessed this quality, and everybody had to fight for mere existence, all kinds of humanising influences were at a standstill. But when society began to be more settled, there arose some as earnest workers in art, literature, and science, most largely represented by the Italian school, as ever existed in the world's history. It requires no proof that many of the artists of the period alluded to have never been exceeded in excellence; that a new literature was established, and, for example, no author who has ever lived has produced works exceeding in sweetness the greater number of the Sonnets of Petrarch, or such poems as his *Trionfo della Morte*. In science, the great problems of doubling the Cape and establishing the fact of the circularity of the earth were solved by those bold navigators Vasco da Gama, Columbus, and their followers. Though we who have the advantage of their labours are prone to make light of the fears of the fellow-voyagers of those great men, if we could but imagine ourselves in the same position in which they were placed, we should soon perceive that it must have required very great courage to undertake such apparently perilous voyages over such vast wastes of ocean, where,

according to the general belief, they might at any moment topple over into space and be sent to look after the lost Pleiad.

Then, again, though we are proud and justly proud of the discoveries of modern times in connection with the arts and sciences, every dispassionate examiner of the consequences of the observation of the homochroniety of the oscillations of the pendulum and such like will see that these were in no way inferior in their uses to the human family to those of discoveries much nearer to us. Each generation stands on the shoulders of its predecessor, and, although the reach of the last may be higher, the individual stature is not necessarily greater.

Or, if some demagogue in public meeting happen to be more than usually violent and personal, it is customary to say that he uttered a Philippic, as if violence and calumny, and not arguments founded on premises, were the characteristics of the great Athenian orator; the truth being that there is not much of such matter in his extant orations, the Philippics themselves being hortatory to take measures to avert a great public danger. We seem to be indebted to Lord Bacon (*Essay on Boldness*) for the current form of the answer of Demosthenes to the question of what are the chief points of oratory: Action, action, action. The repetitions are common to other stories. Libanius, in his Life of Demosthenes prefixed to the *Logoi*, gives the answer simply as *ὑπόκρισις*, acting, not the participle as it is sometimes explained, but histrionism.

The idol which it is desired to knock on the head on the present occasion is the notion that there is a law of dramatic unities, and that this is supported by the great fathers of the drama. This is not only not so, but there is hardly an extant play of these authors that affords the least support to such an opinion. Lord Byron is more than usually persistent and violent in support of the current doctrine in his censures on the dramas of Shakspeare. His lordship says: "If you want to have a notion of what I am trying, take up a *translation* of any of the Greek tragedians. . . . Then judge of

'the simplicity of plot'." As the reader is here referred to any of the Greek plays, it proves that his lordship considered every one of them to be written in accordance with the unities, though, in truth, according to the strict rule of the action of the play being capable of happening during the time of performance, there is not one of them that is so. And though it is not easy to see why these old writers should be supposed to bind everybody for all time, very little doubt exists that his lordship has correctly stated the rule. Having had reason to doubt the exactitude of these utterances, an examination of the whole of the Greek plays has been undertaken in order, if possible, effectually to settle this question. The dramatists are taken in the order of time, and all the points observed upon both begin and end in the course of the respective dramas, time not having been allowed during which they could have occurred.

1. *Æschylus.* In *Prometheus Bound*, the Daughters of the Ocean come from their abodes to the gloomy track of Scythia in consequence of hearing Vulcan hammering at the rocks, that is, thousands of miles. Io happens to come, and so does not count as to time; but Mercury comes from heaven in consequence of the utterances of Prometheus after the arrival of Io. It may be said, in this case, that the gods act quickly. There is nobody else to deal with; but, as far as it goes, it is against the unity of time.

There seems to be nothing in the *Seven against Thebes* to show the time of action. According to the seer who never errs, the attack on the city is to take place at night. But throughout everything is on the said-and-done principle. After the play is far advanced, the spy leaves the city, goes to the hostile army, brings back a full account of its seven divisions and who are to lead the attack; then there are the battles, the combat and death of the brothers, the decrees of the senate, etc. There is no attention to unity of time in this play.

The *Persæ* is rather a dialogue than a play, but very interesting from the circumstance of its being written by a

participator and eyewitness of some of the events it deals with. What the Messenger says no man could know of his own knowledge, and lines 584-97 relate to events that could only happen and be known many months after the opening of the play.

The play of *Agamemnon* opens a little before dawn by the Watchman observing the beacon-fires, and Clytaemnestra fixes the opening of the play very exactly as being the morning born from the night on which Troy was taken—*τῆς νῦν τεκούσης φῶς τόδ' εὐφρόνης λέγω*—and then follows the description of how the signals were sent on, and what the Trojans will have to suffer and the advantages that have accrued to the Greeks, showing that according to her notion they would still be detained a considerable time in Troy. But, at all events, the scene of the drama is at Argos and King Agamemnon is at Troy, and he has to come that distance to his loving wife, Leda's daughter, in order to be murdered. If we might import knowledge from outside the play, a very considerable time elapsed before Agamemnon came to Argos. Homer (*Odyss.* iv, 526) says Agisthus kept watch at the Malian promontory a whole year. An audience would be just as likely to wait for Rip van Winkle to wake up as while Agamemnon was doing this journey.

The *Choëphori* does not seem to offend much against the unities, though the scene is in two places, the palace and tomb of Agamemnon. The simplicity which is so much admired causes Pylades to be addressed several times without his being on the stage. It is difficult to conjecture what the age of Electra should be. By the way she is spoken of in the play, she should be girlish, but by the events she should be a middle-aged woman. Pylades only appears to speak a line or two towards the end of the play.

The scene of the *Furies* opens at Delphi, and then passes to Athens, whither Orestes is pursued by the "old-children". Orestes calls for Minerva, who attends to him immediately, coming from the Scamander, and establishes the court of the Ariou Pagos. In this play, as in most others, things are

ordered to be done, but no time is allowed for doing them. For instance, when the Herald has to blow the trumpet to summon the citizens, when the votes are taken, etc. Here the unities of time and place are disregarded.

The *Suppliants* has more the characteristics of a dialogue than a play. It is probable that the interest that may have been taken in it arose from the music. Even here the prevailing disregard for time is very manifest. For instance, the Suppliants put their branches on the altars, and after the King arrives, Danaus goes to all the public shrines in the city, a meeting is summoned, speeches made, a vote taken, and he returns to his daughters while a few lines are being said. In like manner, Danaus sees from a mound the ships conveying the sons of Ægyptus coming at a distance, and he explains to his daughters the length of time that must elapse before they can possibly arrive, and yet after a few lines are said the Herald comes and seizes the ladies.

From the foregoing it is abundantly clear that Æschylus had no knowledge of these unities.

The next author in point of date is SOPHOCLES.

In the *Ajax*, Ulysses and Minerva have a conversation about the doings of the hero, which Ulysses is to go and report among the Greeks. The Chorus, who are the next speakers, fix the time at which they begin as early dawn (line 141), and yet Ulysses has been all through the Greek host and spread these reports and they are able to state the result. It is impossible that the many things mentioned as being done by and happening to Ajax could have been done in anything like the time allotted, that is between night and early dawn. At line 709, the Chorus speak of a new day and of Ajax offering various sacrifices and being reconciled to the Atridæ, all consequent on these circumstances. This could by no possibility be the same day as that on which the play opens. The Messenger comes bringing news of Teucer's arrival in the camp, the threatenings, reconcilements, etc., down to point. The scene changes at line 815. This is an

offence of another kind against the unities. While Ajax is making his speech in relation to his death, the Chorus, who now appear, are completely exhausted in their fruitless search for him. From what they say (line 879) the journey must have been long and painful.

Electra is not open to objection as to time. Pylades is addressed twice in the course of the play, though he nowhere appears.

Oedipus Tyrannus opens with a Chorus of Suppliants. After their prayer has been granted, an assembly of Cadmean citizens is ordered to be summoned and they assemble; yet there is not a line between these two events, the whole of the difference probably consisting of the Suppliants throwing away their branches and thus becoming Cadmean citizens. After the arrival of Creon from Delphi, it becomes necessary to search for the old cattle-tender, who had expressly gone away into the mountains so that he might never see Thebes again; yet he is sent for and produced while a few lines are being said. Towards the end of the play, the dynasty is changed. Oedipus of the house of Labdacus has been dethroned, and Creon of the house of Menoeceus is ruling in his stead. There is nothing said of the reign of Eteocles.

By no possibility could the events related in *Oedipus Coloneus* have happened in one day, and there is a fair day's work done while the Chorus are singing twenty-two short lines and the rites of the funeral of Oedipus are being carried out.

The *Antigone*, from the speech of the Chorus (lines 100 *et seqq.*), seems to have been intended to open just before dawn. The time of the commencement of the storm is fixed at midday. Any one who will calculate the time likely to be taken by the different events related after this will see that it is a sheer impossibility that they could all be crowded into the day.

The action of the *Trachiniae* extends over a considerable space of time: at least a month. First we have Hyllus with his mother, and it is agreed that he shall go in search

of his father, who is engaged in some distant expedition. Then the Herald arrives with Iole; then the circumstances that lead to the jealousy of Dejanira, the preparation of the garment with the blood of the hydra; the arrival of the Herald where Hercules is; his conquests; the hecatomb where at the slaughter of the twentieth bull the poison of the hydra takes effect; the casting of the Herald into the sea; Hercules being brought home with ceremony, etc.

Philoctetes does not appear to offend much; but even here Philoctetes is supposed to have a long sleep while forty-six lines are being disposed of. It may be noted that in this play Neoptolemus gives himself as coming from Scyros and as never having seen his father. His father belonged to Phthias and was only sent to Scyros to prevent his being impressed for the Trojan war. This lasted but ten years and was not ended at the time when the plot of this play is laid; it follows that Neoptolemus, the "rugged Pyrrhus" of Shakspeare, could not have been more than ten years of age at this time.

Next in order is EURIPIDES.

Rhesus. At line 518, Hector speaks to Rhesus as if the night were just commencing; but from the events of the play it should have been near dawn. As early as line 41 we are told that the Argolic army have had their beacon-fires burning the whole night. The play is meant to be on this night; but the current of time runs backwards and forwards in a singular manner. Although Ulysses and Diomed are accused of the slaughter of Rhesus, they are on the stage talking to Minerva when this occurs (line 670).

Medea does not seem to offend.

In *Hippolytus*, Venus, who prologues, threatens to destroy Hippolytus that very day. He is residing at the house of his guardian in Trœzene, where the scene is laid. Theseus and his wife are described by Venus as being on the sea coming from Athens. At lines 135-40, the Chorus inform

us that they had heard from an attendant at the rock by the ocean, that Phædra, who at line 36 was on the sea, had not taken food for three days and was anxious for death to come. The Nurse also speaks of the same three days. That this time is after her arrival at Trozene is shown by her husband's want of knowledge of her illness being accounted for by his absence in the country, as he says farther on, having been to the oracle. At line 803, Theseus asks the Chorus whether his wife died wasted with sorrow, which makes it manifest that he must have left her a considerable time. At line 889, Theseus begs that Hippolytus may be slain that day. He is sent into exile. The Chorus say forty lines, then comes the Servant to announce his death, which occurs in a land outside the government of Theseus. He reports at length the circumstances. The permission of Theseus is obtained and Hippolytus is brought back at the point of death. All this must have taken days to carry out.

Alcestis. In this play Alcestis dies. Hercules arrives and goes into the guest-chamber. Pheres arrives bringing ornaments for the funeral, so that some time may be supposed to have elapsed. Meanwhile Hercules is feasting and getting drunk. After Pheres is gone, the body is taken into the suburbs of the town for burial, line 740 says to the pyre, but the circumstances show that it must have been a burial, especially as at lines 365-6 Admetus desires to be placed in the same cedar. Hercules brings Alcestis home; but he must have been away a long time to render his story about the wrestlings probable, and then Alcestis could not have come back to her husband in her grave-clothes, as they would have been recognised. Altogether, although it is difficult here to reckon what space of time the play occupies, it will be found to be considerably more than will suit the unities.

In the *Heraclidae*, Copræus at line 274 leaves the Temple of Jupiter at Athens to go to Eurystheus, who is waiting on the confines of Alcathus. At line 375, Demophoön is to call an assembly of the citizens, so as to raise as large an army

as possible ; he is to send out spies and to have an assembly of soothsayers to sacrifice. While the Chorus are disposing of twenty-eight lines, Demophoön has reconnoitred the army of Eurystheus, who had not yet entered the country ; the army of Athens had been assembled, sacrifices had been prepared, and the bards have been collected and all the old oracles have been tested. In addition to this, there are reports of the meetings of various citizens in reference to these matters. At line 630, the Servant arrives bringing intelligence that the hostile armies are in close proximity to one another. After line 747, the Servant and the old cripple Iolaus set out to join the army, which it has been seen was assembled on the frontier, the Servant carrying Iolaus's panoply, he being too feeble to bear it himself. After the Chorus have said or sung thirty-six lines, a Servant comes announcing not only their arrival on the field, but relating the struggle, the victory, and the exploits of Iolaus. In addition to all this, a trophy has been erected on the field of battle, an image of Jupiter set up, and Eurystheus, who has been pursued and captured, is brought to Athens.

The *Suppliants*. The scene of this play is at the Temple of Ceres, at Eleusina. At line 354, Theseus says that he is going away to call a meeting of citizens, to have speeches, take a vote, etc., as to rescuing the dead at Thebes. At line 474, the order is given to assemble the army for Thebes, and Theseus leaves the stage at line 597. At line 634, the Messenger brings the news of the hard-fought battle at Thebes. Theseus buries the bodies of those who fell at Cithaeron, and himself washes and covers the dead bodies of the seven. At line 838, Theseus reappears, and the bodies are burnt on two pyres ; and at line 1115 the bones of their children are brought to the Chorus. It would seem as if the author contemplated the piece extending over a considerable time, as Evadne, who throws herself on the pyre of her husband, and Iphis must have come from Argos, and have been living at Athens some little time, from what Iphis says of the watch being kept over Evadne. So the news of this battle must have been carried from Thebes to Argos, and then these must

have set off to Athens. At line 166, Adrastus calls himself old (*τολμώς ἀνίψ*), and at line 250 the Chorus excuse his fault as being an error of youth.

Trojades. There is very little action in this play, consisting as it does mostly of lamentations and speeches. At line 8, Neptune says that Troy is burnt down and destroyed, and this is spoken of at various places in the play. At line 720, the towers are said to be still standing, and at line 777 Talthybius takes Hector's child to be thrown off the battlements, the scene of the play being at the ships. At line 1123, he brings him back, having washed him on his journey in the river Scamander, in order that he may be adorned for the funeral, and himself digs the grave. At line 1260, Talthybius appears again, and orders the band with torches to burn the city of Priam, and at line 1325 the sound of the fall of Pergamus is heard.

Ion. Xuthus is commanded by Apollo to salute the first man he meets on entering the temple as his son. After the first awkwardness is got over, he bids this person at line 663 to invite all his friends at Delphi to a bull-sacrifice, where he is to be named Ion. At line 1122, the Servant arrives who gives the account of the whole proceeding, which includes, besides the bull-sacrifice itself, the erecting a tent which covers a plethron (said to be ten thousand feet) of space, and is very richly decorated, libations, the poisoning, the sentence on Creusa, the search after her, etc. This all happens in a country to which Xuthus is a stranger and there can have been no previous preparation.

Helen. Menelaus seems to have gone direct to the palace in his tattered garments, and at line 597 the Messenger arrives from his companions left in the cave, who says he has been all over the barbarian land in search of him. At line 1383 is related how Helen has washed and rehabilitated Menelaus. At line 1412, Theoclymenus orders a ship of fifty oars to be got ready. From the speech of the Messenger, it is evident that the ship had to be completely equipped; they sail a moderate distance from the land; there is a severe

fight among the sailors, and the barbarians are turned over-board, and the Messenger, who must have been in the ship much later than the others, lets himself down by the anchor, and is eventually drawn ashore exhausted and then comes to the King. All this takes place while the Chorus are disposing of sixty-one lines. At line 1278 Theoclymenus says that he wishes to train his wife, namely Helen, to piety, and at line 1288 Menelaus addresses her by the term which is usually adopted for a girl (*λεάνη*). As they seem to have had a grown-up daughter before going to Troy, and Menelaus says in this play that the siege took ten years and he had been wandering seven years, it is plain they must both have been quite elderly people.

Andromache. The scene is at Phthias. All goes well in this play till Orestes comes on the scene, who at lines 885–6, before he sees Hermione, says that he is going to the prophetic shrines at Dodona. At line 984, Orestes tells Hermione *ἄξω σ' ἀπ' οἴκων καὶ παρὸς δώσω χερί* (I will lead you from this house and give you into the hands of your father). At lines 995 *et seqq.* is mentioned the plot to assassinate Neoptolemus at the shrine of Apollo at Delphi, which Orestes says is contrived *τρὸς τῆρες χειρός* (by these hands). At line 1069, the Messenger arrives giving the account of the assassination, in which Orestes was a participator. There can be no mistake about this, as lines 1114–5 say *ὅν Κλυταιμνήστρας τόκος εἴς ήν* (of whom the son of Clytaemnestra was one), and at line 1242 the goddess Thetis says *φόνον βίαιον τῆς Ὀρεστείας χερός* (his violent murder at the hands of Orestes). Neoptolemus is brought back to Phthias by his friends. Thus in the space of a few lines of the play Orestes carries off Hermione from Phthias to her father, presumably to Sparta; goes to Delphi, and according to the Messenger is active in plotting the murder for two or three days; is at the commission of the murder; and afterwards the murdered man is brought to Phthias. At lines 967–9, there is a curious instance of the disregard of these old writers for the element of time. Orestes says that previously to his going to Troy

Hermione's father had given her to him for a wife. Σοῦ πατρὸς κάκη | δε πρὶν τὰ Τροίας εἰσβαλεῖν ὁρίσματα, | γυναῖκ' ἔμοι δούς (your father's baseness, who gave you me for a wife before entering the confines of Troy). Orestes is always represented as an infant in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, and Hermione was probably as old as Iphigenia. It is usual to say that it was her grandfather who betrothed her, but this is not what Euripides says. It has been necessary to be more circumstantial than in the other cases, as some of the authorities say that Orestes was not actually at the murder, but was only the contriver, an opinion which is seen not to have the least foundation.

Electra. The scene is at the dwelling of the Peasant far from the city of Argos (line 246) on a starlit night. At line 81, the Peasant leaves with his oxen to plough and sow the land; and at line 341 he returns, having finished his labours. At line 431, he goes to the Old Man (the guardian), who resides on the confines of Argos and Sparta. At line 487, the Old Man appears, bringing provisions for the strangers, and has gone out of his way to pour libations, etc., at the tomb of Agamemnon. After line 693, the Old Man goes as a guide to Orestes to where Ægisthus is sacrificing in the fields, and is then to go on to Clytaemnestra at Argos to induce her to visit Electra. At line 988, Clytaemnestra appears. Besides the other travelling about, the various events here related show that a long time must have elapsed from the Old Man setting out to the arrival of Clytaemnestra.

In the *Bacchæ*, at line 215, Pentheus says that he has just arrived from the country and heard of the disorders caused by the Bacchæ. They are imprisoned, escape, and are seen dancing in the meadows by a servant, who knows all about them. While the Chorus are disposing of thirty-seven lines, Bacchus has been arrested and brought before Pentheus, who orders him to be put in prison, from which he escapes, many things being done which must have occupied a considerable time. Then, after line 976, Bacchus, Pentheus, and Servant go to the mountains to see the orgiasts, and, after the Chorus

has disposed of thirty-nine lines, the Servant arrives bringing a particular account of events that must have occupied at least a day. After this Cadmus comes on the scene, who had come back from these revels to the city, heard of their calamitous result, goes back to find the body of Pentheus, which is torn to pieces and cast about in a thicket difficult to be searched, and after a myriad labours (line 1218) the scattered members are brought together and carried to the palace at Thebes, which in the earlier part of this play (line 633) had been destroyed.

Hecuba. The scene is on the sea-shore opposite to the coast of Thrace. Polixena leaves the scene going to the sacrifice. After thirty-nine lines, Talthybius comes as a messenger from the chiefs, and gives a description extending over sixty-five lines of the things which have happened, which must have occupied a good deal of time. In consequence of finding the dead body of Polydore, Hecuba is delayed in going to her daughter's obsequies; King Agamemnon arrives and Hecuba ultimately obtains permission to send for the King of Thrace, who arrives with his two sons after a few lines have been sung by the Chorus. The two sons are slain and the King's eyes are put out.

Hercules Furens. At line 23, Hercules is said to have gone to Hades through the mouth of Taenarus, and it is plain from line 617 that as soon as he comes from thence with the dog he hastens to Thebes, and from line 621 that his companion Theseus goes immediately to Athens. Madness leaves at line 873 to enter Hercules. At line 922, appears the Messenger, who gives the account of what happened in consequence, and which must have occupied many hours, and during the action Hercules goes through a sleep and is fastened to a broken column. At line 1163, Theseus appears, who had previously gone to Athens. He brings aid to recover the throne for Lycus. All this must have occupied a long time.

The *Phœnissæ* is open to the objection that more is crowded into it than could possibly be performed. Besides this,

Eteocles is King when the play opens and Creon when it finishes, who banishes Edipus, who had been for some time residing in the palace.

Orestes opens with the hero lying on his couch sick and exhausted; he is led away to the place of trial, and, according to the account, a good many speeches are made and a vote taken condemning him to death. Then he addresses the jury again, and he is led back to the palace, while a very few lines are being spoken in the play. The preparation and attack on Helen, mentioned by the Phrygian, are liable to the same objections. This play does not violently offend against the unities.

Iphigenia in Tauris apparently opens at early morning. Orestes and Pylades survey the temple and return to the ship; are seen by the herdsmen, and are eventually captured and brought before Thoas, who sends them to the priestess to be sacrificed. The events narrated must have occupied a considerable space of time. Then nothing out of the way happens till, at line 1284, the Messenger arrives and gives the account of the attempt to escape, the whole of the proceedings connected with which must have occupied a good while. Then there is the address at line 1446 by Minerva to Orestes, who is absent, which seems something like a violation of an unity.

Iphigenia in Aulis does not appear to offend so much against the unities. The places where Agamemnon converses with the servant and where Menelaus stops him must be different, but as they need not be very far apart this circumstance is perhaps unimportant. But after line 1509, while the Chorus are saying twenty-three lines, a great many things are done. Iphigenia goes to the sacrifice; a stag is burnt; the Messenger comes back, etc. The play opens in the night, while Sirius and the Pleiades are to be seen.

Cyclops. Passing over the drunkenness of Silenus, which must have happened after the arrival of Ulysses, the time it must have taken the Cyclops to kill, dress, cook, and banquet

on his companions, and afterwards get drunk, as related by Ulysses at lines 382 *et seqq.*, must have been great, and yet there is not the interval of a line for it to take place, as the little the Chorus say is on the same theme. Line 455 shows that the scheme for blinding the Cyclops was concocted after the banquet.

Lastly, we come to ARISTOPHANES, who of all the Greek authors shows the greatest unacquaintance with the unities.

In *Plutus*, Chremylos only meets with Plutus after the opening of the play and is poor, and yet at line 338 it is stated to be the talk of barbers' shops that he has become suddenly rich, etc. Then Plutus is carried to the temple of Æsculapius on a bed, is washed in the sea, and Cario sleeps a night in the temple before he comes to tell his story. What Mercury and the Priest speak to relates to a considerable time.

The *Clouds*. The action of this play must extend over years, as the father and son are embued in sequence with the Socratic philosophy. What Strepsiades says of himself at lines 718-22, and the last clause of which is, "in addition to these evils, I am little short of vanishing myself singing the night-watches", is quite sufficient to put the sticklers for the unities out of court.

The scene of the *Frogs* opens apparently at Thebes, and then changes to Hades. From the speech of Bacchus, lines 108 *et seqq.*, it is clear that in his view the journey will take a considerable time: Xanthias is not a god. Then Proserpine's preparations for the dinner of the supposed Hercules, who was well known in Hades as a voracious eater, and which included a broiled ox, must have taken some little time to cook nicely even in the establishment of Proserpine. Altogether this play manifests the greatest disregard of the unities both of time and place.

In the *Birds*, the town of Nephelococcygia is only thought of being built after the opening of the play, and yet Peis-

thetæros, at lines 922-3, says that he is sacrificing on its tenth, its naming day, as was usual with Athenian children.

The scene of the *Knights* is all in Athens; but even here time is wanted to prepare the presents for Demus, boiling him, etc.

In the *Peace*, the scene commences on the Earth, and afterwards changes to Heaven. The reason for using so disgusting an animal as the dung-beetle is the length of the voyage and the necessity of avoiding having to provide a double commissariat. Two unities are violated here.

In the *Lysistrata*, line 725 speaks of something which had happened "yesterday", this event being in the course of action of the play. Then Myrrhina's child has been left unwashed and unsuckled for six days. This could not be according to the unities.

The *Acharnians* opens at the Prytanæum at Athens, and is afterwards transferred to the place of Dicæopolis in the country. Time must be allowed for the Messenger to go to Lacedæmon to make the peace and come back; also for the Bœotians and others to become acquainted with it, so as to bring their wares to market. Two unities are violated.

The scene of the *Wasps* is partly in the house of Bdelycleon and partly in the public streets. Some days must be allowed to elapse for what Bdelycleon says at lines 503 *et seqq.* to have been carried out.

The scene of the *Thesmophoriazusæ* opens at Agathon's house, and then changes to the Temple of Ceres.

The *Ecclesiasousæ* has various scenes; and though everything is represented as having occurred between one midnight and another, in that time the government of the country has been completely changed, having been transferred from the men to the women. Provision is made for feeding the whole of the men at public dinners, etc.

It results, then, from this examination of these authors that they had no knowledge of, or if they did had no care

for, the unities. Had there been but one or two departures they would have furnished sufficient authority, if such were needed, to later authors. Instead of this, there is hardly a play which can be pointed to in which there is any semblance of the unity of time; and as the scenery of the Greek theatre must have been mostly fixed, the opportunity for change of scene would consequently be very limited, yet of this there are several striking examples. The great object of these writers must have been to work out their stories in such a manner as to please their audiences, and they did not trouble themselves about these extraneous matters. A great parade is sometimes made about the simplicity of the Greek theatre. It could not be avoided. As there were but three actors besides the Chorus, only three actors could be on the stage at one time. But this did not prevent there being numerous characters, which must have rendered it difficult to the writers so to arrange their plots as to give the actors time to change their dresses. The following are a few instances of the number of characters, and the reader can easily reckon how many parts each actor must have taken. *Rhesus* and *Phœnissæ*, 11; *Orestes*, 10; *Birds*, 22; *Acharnians*, 20; *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, 15; *Phutus*, 12; but very frequently there are eight or nine. Except at the great Dionysian festivals, the plays appear to have been performed mostly on wagons, and thus the requiring so few actors would have been advantageous. But to say that because the Greeks only had three actors moderns should be bound to the same number is absurd. If this argument were pushed to its legitimate conclusion, Sophocles did wrong in adding the tritagonistes and Æschylus the actor of the first parts, and there should never have been a departure from the Goat-song.

It is thus clear that the notion of there being a law of dramatic unities is nothing better than an idle dream.

NOTE ON GREEK TIME.

Greek time in general is a very perplexing subject, especially with regard to the months. When the corresponding

months are wanted to be known in the Greek and English year, if the months of one series were put into one hat and the other into another, and the first month drawn from each taken to represent one another, the result would be as likely to be correct as by any elaborate calculations. And yet we find English writers on Greek subjects giving the corresponding months as pat as if there were no doubt about it. In Ainsworth's *Dictionary*, the Julian Calendar is given with the corresponding Greek months, and the first day of each month is made to coincide, notwithstanding that the Greek months are shorter than the Roman, the Greeks perhaps being supposed to white out their months the same as a printer does his pages to make them the proper length. The Greek year consisted of twelve lunar months alternately of twenty-nine and thirty days, consequently of three hundred and fifty-four days, thus being eleven days short of the solar year as then reckoned. To make the two equivalent, every third year there was an intercalary month of thirty-three days. This of itself would make the coincidence of any two months very doubtful; but when it is remembered that the quarter of a day was never brought into account (and as appears from Herodotus it is the same in the Egyptian year, which consisted of twelve months of thirty days each, with five intercalary days each year, which arrangement Herodotus considers superior to the Greek method) a month that was in winter in one century might be approaching summer in another. Thus suppose the first day of Gamelion and January could be shown from some circumstance to coincide B.C. 5; 105 B.C. it would be twenty-five days later; 205 B.C. fifty days; and so on. It seems the only safe way, as is sometimes done, is to give the Greek month which is on the document translated and leave the judicious reader to make what he can of it.

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